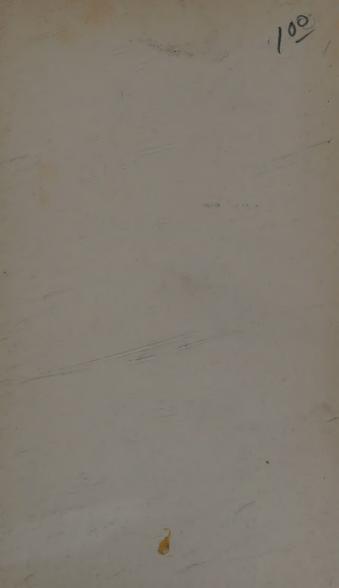
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# ALED TRUTH

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#### The Treasury of the Baith Series: 1

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#### FAITH AND REVEALED TRUTH



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President of Fordham University, New York

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Archbishop, New York

New York, April 9th, 1929

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THE insistence by the Catholic Church on the principle of authority has exposed her to the charge of ignoring or even denying the rights of reason. Yet even a superficial knowledge of her teaching would show how unfounded is such an accusation. Far from minimizing the part which reason plays in religious faith, the Church urges its claims and assigns to it loftier functions than those claimed in its behalf by Rationalistic schools.

There is not and never can be any opposition between the truth discovered by human reason and that assented to in divine faith. To one who has rightly grasped the nature of truth and its source, such an assertion would seem superfluous. Yet day after day is this opposition insisted on anew in Reformation and Modernistic schools, despite the clear pronouncements of the Church in Ecumenical Councils, and the statements of her Pontiffs and her theologians.

If in any place the doctrine of the Church would seem to go counter to the rights and claims of human reason this would certainly be in the absolute, childlike faith demanded

of her sons. This faith is not a blind and unreasonable subservience of unthinking slaves or sentimentalists. It does not involve an unwarranted surrender of man's dearest prerogatives of reason and freedom. It is not the destruction of reason but its elevation to the loftier plane. Either a new body of truth whose very existence could not have been discovered by its unaided resources is thus brought within the power of human reason, or at least a firmer security is guaranteed to truths of the natural order because of the higher motive which now determines the assent.

As faith is the very beginning of all justification, it is well for son and alien alike to understand better what part the Church attributes to human reason in this fundamental act. The honest inquirer who knows from reason the obligation of divine worship will naturally strive to learn the truths which express his relationship to God and the duties which are consequent to these truths. Taking man as we actually find him, the difficulty of attaining the necessary knowledge of what religion is will prove to him the moral necessity of some divine immediate revelation, even of truths which belong to the natural order. Human reason must be convinced of the possibility of such a revelation, and further that

it has actually been vouchsafed. It rightly demands proof of the claim made by God's mouthpiece and must convince itself of the credibility of the truth proposed by a thorough examination of the credentials of the spokesman.

Can the human intellect acquire such conviction? If so, how shall it treat the truth proposed when this is of an order whose inner nature transcends the native power of created reason. The intellect cannot reasonably assent in any act without an adequate motive, but the motive required in the assent of faith is not to be confounded with that evidence which forces the faculty in the assent of natural certitude. Faith of its very nature, as is evident from the words of St. Paul, involves some obscurity. The will has its part to play in demanding that, in spite of this obscurity, the intellect should yield assent. How can this act of the will itself be rational? Can we say it is not a tyrannous overthrow of the intellect? What part does Grace play when there is question of an act of divine faith which is salutary? Why should the will submit to the dictates of an authoritative Church and demand the assent of the intellect to a truth which that Church proposes?

These and countless similar questions demand an answer, and Catholic doctrine has

ever insisted that a satisfactory answer can and

should be given.

In this first volume of the Treasury of the Faith Series entitled Faith and Revealed Truth, we have a clear and succinct answer to these all-important questions. Truly welcome, therefore, is such a volume to the possessor as well as the seeker after religious truth.

REV. WM. J. DUANE, S.J. President of Fordham University

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#### CHAPTER I

#### INTRODUCTORY

"I so run, not as at an uncertainty; I so fight, not as one beating the air."1 Catholic, strong in faith, might well describe his attitude towards life in these confident words of S Paul. He is in no doubt as to his destiny, nor as to the manner in which he must achieve it. God, his attributes, his providential designs in man's regard, man's own duties to his Creator and to his fellowmen-all this, and much more, he knows with a certainty that is supreme. These religious truths are the basis of his life; his appreciation of them determines the whole course of his existence; and if concerning them he had the slightest real doubt, his outlook would be radically changed. He is certain that there is a God, his Creator and Lord, whose loving friendship he must at all costs retain; did he doubt it, his obedience

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ix 26.

to what he conceives as divine commands would falter. He is certain that there awaits him a life after death in which, if he has been faithful, he will enjoy God's eternal embrace; did he doubt it, his life on earth would be deprived of all meaning and purpose.

If, therefore, a man is to lead a religious life—and a religious life is synonymous with a good one—he must have firm and sound convictions concerning God and his duties in God's regard. He must have convictions, otherwise his life will be purposeless; they must be firm, else he will be inconsistent in practice as his theory is vacillating; they must be sound, for upon them depends the success or the failure of his life. The Catholic has certainty on these vital matters because God has revealed them to him. His hope rests upon the firm foundation of God's word. "Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for."

But to judge the value of revealed truth merely by its use in action would be to estimate it incompletely. Revelation extends the field of our knowledge, and this itself is a perfection of the mind, the noblest faculty of man. By revelation we receive something of the inner radiance of God's glory; by faith we learn divine truths of which humanly we should never have dreamed. By faith we are given a foretaste of the wonders which will

#### INTRODUCTORY

be fully disclosed only when we see God, no longer "through a glass in a dark manner," but face to face. In the meantime the radiance is too bright for our finite minds. We adore, but we cannot see. "Faith is the evidence of things that appear not."

To display the riches contained in revelation is the object of the subsequent volumes of this series. In this, the first, we must study the meaning of revelation itself, and the act

of faith by which we accept it.

#### CHAPTER II

#### RELIGION AND HUMAN REASON

THE Catholic theologian sets out with the supposition-which as a philosopher he is prepared to vindicate—that the human mind is able to know truth. If anyone, therefore, in that unhappy state of mind which despairs of attaining certain knowledge upon any subject whatever, should hope to find in this volume a philosophical proof of the validity of mental processes, then he is doomed to disappointment. The sceptic, before he can approach the study of theology, or in fact of any science at all, must first find his remedy in a sound and true philosophy. Nor is it within the province of the theologian as such -although again as a philosopher he may be well equipped-to justify the first principles of analytical reasoning, to prove that the conclusions which issue from the application of those principles are valid, even though they may lead the mind into a realm of reality of which no actual experience is given, and thus cannot be verified by experiment. The demonstration of these and kindred truths belongs to a branch of knowledge which is antecedent to the science of theology.

I venture to hope, however, that those who

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read this series of volumes have remained unaffected by the wave of scepticism and agnosticism which has swept over Europe during the last two or three centuries. It is an interesting phenomenon of religious history that the heresy of Luther, taking its rise in a proud rebellion against the teaching authority of the Catholic Church, issued in a pessimistic theology which, exaggerating the effects of original sin, presented human nature as intrinsically corrupt. The human will bereft of freedom was radically incapable of pursuing the good, the human reason was powerless to know the truth. As man's broken will must submit passively to the grace of God, so must his mind now, darkened by sin, allow itself to be led by occult and irresistible force, a blind and unreasoning faith. The agnosticism of Kant and his disciples, which, denying the validity of metaphysical argument, takes refuge, in order to justify religious belief, either in the dictates of the practical reason or in an unreasoning religious sense, is an essentially Protestant philosophy; and of this tendency to rely upon a blind instinct in religious matters the modern forms of exaggerated-and therefore false-mysticism, the systems of religious pragmatism and sentimentalism, so common outside the Church, are the more or less direct descendants.

From all such attempts to disparage the powers of the human reason the Catholic Church has remained ever aloof. Some of her children, it is true, have not been immune from the anti-intellectualist atmosphere of their time; but they have been solemnly warned and, when occasion demanded, condemned by the ever-watchful guardian of Divine Truth. Thus the Traditionalists of the nineteenth century, convinced by the German agnostics that the foundations of religious belief and practice, such as the existence of God, the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, could no longer be justified by an appeal to reason, had recourse to the inheritance of truth which the human race has received by tradition from antiquity, and ultimately from God. The suggestion was well-intentioned and, like most errors, contained a considerable measure of truth. The Traditionalists rendered valuable service by emphasizing the great part played by human authority in the acquisition of knowledge; it is true, moreover, that we receive much of our religious knowledge from divine revelation. But these faint-hearted apologists, by denying to human reason the power to prove the existence of a God who reveals, rendered all faith in him unreasonable. To save the ship they cast away the compass; and the Church was not

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slow to reject this ill-judged compromise with

scepticism.

More recently certain restless spirits within the Church, anxious to reconcile Catholic doctrine with the so-called exigencies of "Modern Thought," formed the school known as Modernism. Rejecting with Kant all rational demonstrations of religious tenets, and borrowing from his disciple Schleiermacher "the religious sense" as a criterion of truth, the Modernists found the source and the explanation of all religion in a subconscious "need of the divine." Thus the revelation which the Traditionalists (rightly) sought from God the Modernists (wrongly) thought to find within the nature of man himself. From this the way lies open to pantheism, to the rejection of all dogmas, and indeed of all objective religious truth. It would be beyond the scope of this little volume even to enumerate the manifold errors which Modernism involves; it was rightly stigmatized by Pope Pius X as "a compendium of all heresies." 1

The teaching of the Catholic Church on this all-important subject is stated clearly by the Vatican Council: "Holy Mother Church

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>I write of Modernism in the past tense, because for Catholics it is a thing of the past. Nevertheless the view is still held by many outside the Catholic Church.

holds and teaches that God, the beginning and end of all things, may be certainly known by the natural light of human reason by means of created things." The terms of the oath against Modernism render impossible any misunderstanding of this definition. By "created things" are meant, not merely hu-man testimony, not merely a subconscious religious sense, but the "visible works of creation"; and lest there should be any doubt as to the manner in which our knowledge of God is acquired, the formula tells us that it is by applying the principle of causality to the data of experience: "God . . . is known as a cause through his effects."

The Church, in thus vindicating the power of human reason to know God, is but reaffirming what S Paul had said in his Epistle to the Romans: "The invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." 2 But the power of the human mind is not limited to the mere knowledge of the existence of God. Man is able unaided to know much concerning the nature of God; he can know many of his own duties in regard to his Creator, duties of worship, love and thanksgiving; he can learn naturally much

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Const. de fide cath., chapter ii. <sup>2</sup> Rom. i 20; cf. Wisd. xiii 1-9.

#### RELIGION AND HUMAN REASON

concerning his own nature and destiny, his duties to himself and to his fellow men. There is, in short, a whole body of religious truth—the truths of the natural order—which man is able to acquire with certainty by the normal use of his natural powers.

But while the Church is solicitous to vindicate the just rights of the human reason, while she has no sympathy with those who unduly disparage it, yet she strenuously resists the proud claim of Rationalism that it is "the sole judge of the true and the false . . . that it is a law to itself and sufficient by its natural powers to procure the good of men and peoples." She asserts the essential soundness of the human mind and its radical capacity for learning all natural truth; but she is mindful that man is in a fallen state, that disordered passion and the manifold distractions of material things hamper and retard him in his pursuit of religious knowledge. What I have called truths of the natural order can be known and demonstrated by the proper application of the principles of reasoning; but such a process requires a special type of mind, it needs leisure, concentration, an environment conducive to thought. Experience shows that not all men have the ability to follow reasoning, be it of the most

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Syllabus of Pius IX, n. 3.

elementary kind; some men have a practical rather than a speculative bent. Many who have the ability have not the leisure for these studies. The practical difficulties become more evident when one considers that the rational proofs of such truths as the spirituality of the human soul, the freedom of the will, if they are to stand the test of modern objections, require as a preliminary a long and arduous study of metaphysics and psychology. Add to this, that religious knowledge is of paramount importance for man's daily life, necessary especially in youth, when the character is in process of formation, necessary precisely at the time when, through mental immaturity and lack of concentration, he is least likely to be able to acquire it.

Thus if we view mankind as a whole, if we consider the difficulties with which men are beset, it is clear that, left to their own resources very few would gain adequate knowledge even of the truths of natural religion. Nor does human authority offer an adequate solution of the difficulty. History shows that the great thinkers of antiquity—not to speak of more recent or contemporary philosophers—have been unable to impose their doctrine beyond a certain school. The clamour of diverse views, the difficulty of the subject-matter, the lack of authority in the

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teacher to impose belief upon those who cannot understand his reasoning—all this rendered, and still renders, merely human teaching authority powerless to supply the need of mankind for religious instruction. On this subject above all man needs an omniscient and infallible Teacher.

Hence, even though the field of religious doctrine were confined to "natural" truth, man's need of divine aid is apparent. But it should be carefully noted that this need arises, not, as the Traditionalists contended, from the radical impotence of the human mind as such, but from other circumstances of human life which render it practically impossible for all men to discover these truths for themselves with any sufficient degree of accuracy and certainty. Briefly, just as in the practical order grace is morally necessary in order that men may observe all the precepts of the natural law, so is revelation necessary for a complete knowledge of the truths of natural religion.1 The exaggerated claim of Rationalism is thus seen to be unreasonable.

But here again, in a most important particular, the Church opposes the Rationalist. According to the latter, not only can the human mind unaided know all natural truth, but natural truth is all that there is to know.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. vol. vii: Actual Grace, pp. 17-19.

The Church, on the other hand, teaches that there is an order of reality above that of nature, an order of reality which is beyond the reach of the human mind: the supernatural order.

And that such an order exists does not seem a priori unlikely. God, as S Paul tells us, has left traces of himself in his handiwork, and man is able from the consideration of created perfections to learn much concerning his Creator. Even the little that we naturally know of God would lead us to conjecture that there is much more of which we know nothing; that there are divine perfections of which no clear trace appears in the works of creation, that besides the natural truths of religion there may be hidden truths concerning God and things divine, "mysteries"—i.e., truths which must remain God's secret unless and until he vouchsafes to make them known.

The supernatural order, therefore, by its very character is outside the scope of our natural knowledge and comprehension. We can know nothing of it unless God wills to reveal it. The impotence of human reason in respect of supernatural truths is physical and absolute. Natural truth is within the reach of the human mind. The reasons which show an adequate and universal knowledge of this order to be morally impossible

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without revelation are concerned not with the powers of the human mind itself, but with such concomitant circumstances as lack of ability, or time, or concentration. But no course of study, however long, however arduous, could bring the human—or indeed the angelic—mind to the discovery of a supernatural truth. This calls for a special intervention of God, for the inauguration of a divine intercourse with man whereby he communicates knowledge otherwise unattainable; in other words a supernatural revelation.

Man's need of revelation is therefore twofold. He needs it for ease and security even in the sphere of natural research; he needs it absolutely if he is to know God's secrets. The first need God might have supplied by help of the natural order, by an enlightenment or an inspiration which would have been included in God's natural Providence in man's regard. God, however, has willed to destine man for a supernatural end, and every help that he grants is bestowed with that end in view. Man's twofold need is met by one Divine revelation which is supernatural in character, and in its content partly supernatural and partly natural. By one and the same revelation he supplies a remedy to man's natural weakness, and discloses truths which no finite mind could ever have learned.

#### CHAPTER III

#### SUPERNATURAL REVELATION

IT is important for a proper understanding of our subject to have a clear idea of what is meant by divine revelation. The word "revelation" is used in many senses. In common parlance it often means the disclosure of a fact hitherto unknown: "What you say is a revelation to me"; and in theology the word sometimes has this meaning. Or, again, it is said that God has "revealed" himself in the works of creation; and in this sense the Psalmist sings that "the heavens tell forth the glory of God." Moreover, God may manifest some truth to man by an interior enlightenment of his mind, in such a way that the favoured soul is unaware of the origin of his knowledge; he simply begins to know what he did not know before. Of such a kind was the infused knowledge granted to many of the saints. Such a mysterious illumination also may be called a "revelation." The Modernists used the word in a special sense. By "revelation" they meant the manifestation of a religious truth made in consciousness by the religious sense; for them

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it was nothing else than a personal religious

experience.

But when the Church uses the word "revelation" in connection with faith, it has the definite meaning of a divine testimony. Revelation is the act whereby God speaks to man, making a statement to the truth of which he testifies. "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past to the prophets, last of all in these days hath spoken to us by his Son." 1 Hence the Vatican Council describes faith as a "virtue whereby . . . we believe that the things which he has revealed are true . . . because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, and who can neither be deceived nor deceive." 2 The oath against Modernism, to exclude the perverted sense given to the word in that theory, uses even clearer terms. Faith is there defined as "a true intellectual assent given to a truth received by hearing from without, whereby . . . we believe to be true the things that have been said, testified and revealed by a personal God, our creator and Lord."

Revelation, then, is not an interior emotional experience; it is a statement of truth made to man in a definite place, at a definite

<sup>1</sup> Heb. i 1.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter iii.

time, by a personal God who is outside and distinct from the recipient. Moreover it is essential to the concept of revelation as understood by the Church that the statement in question be authenticated: the statement is received by the believer as made by God, and accepted because it is made by God. Infused knowledge, therefore, unless it is infused with clear notification of its divine origin, is not the revelation which faith presupposes. Furthermore, this revelation is distinct from the manifestation of his perfections which God has given to us in creation. It is true to say that God "speaks" to us in the works of nature, inasmuch as those works "reveal" his presence and activity; it is true, but it is metaphorical. Revelation properly understood implies a personal intercourse between God and man, wherein God truly speaksi.e., makes an assertion—which man accepts on God's personal authority.

Hence revelation is supernatural—supernatural not only because it contains supernatural truths, but also because the very act whereby God reveals is beyond the ordinary course of nature. In the ordinary course of nature God teaches us through external creation, through the voice of conscience, through our own conscious needs and desires. By supernatural revelation God teaches us

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himself. "All thy children shall be taught of God." 1

I have said that God's revelation contains supernatural truths. The essence of revelation does not demand that what is revealed should be hitherto unknown or otherwise unknowable. Much that God has revealed man may already have discovered by the natural light of reason; in which case the authority of divine teaching but confirms the conclusions of the human mind. But even if the truth revealed is a mystery properly so called—that is, a truth which the human reason itself is incapable of discovering, or of comprehending when it has ascertained ityet it contains an element which is not new: the terms in which the revelation is made are familiar. It is not true to say that the mysteries of our faith are unintelligible. The unintelligible, the meaningless, precisely because it is meaningless, can have no relation to the human mind. Thus an unknown language is unintelligible, because it conveys no meaning; it corresponds to no idea in consciousness. A mystery is incomprehensible, if you will, but it is not meaningless; it conveys a very definite meaning. The proposition that Jesus Christ is both God and man, that he is one person who has two

natures, the human and the divine, is incomprehensible indeed; but it is not without meaning. It is full of meaning, so full that man with his finite mind will never exhaust it.

If divine revelation is supernatural in character, if it is beyond the ordinary course of nature, it follows that man can have no natural title or claim to it. It is a grace, an entirely gratuitous gift of God. Hence although, as we saw in the previous chapter, the conditions of human existence indicate the need of some help from God for a universal and sufficient knowledge of religious truth, yet we cannot argue from this to the existence of a supernatural revelation. Apologists rightly point out how wonderfully revealed truth harmonizes with the intimate needs and desires of mankind. But it is too little to say: "This is exactly what we needed." It is far in excess of what we had any right to expect. In this as in all else God has been more than just, he has been generously bountiful to his creatures.

And how has this supernatural revelation been made? Its history may be given in the inspired words of Holy Writ: "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all in these days hath spoken to us by his

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Son." 1 "And Jesus spoke to his Apostles, saying: Going therefore, teach ye all nations; ... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." 2

Undoubtedly, had God so willed, he might have communicated his testimony directly to each member of the human race as soon as he was capable of receiving it. The contention of Protestanism is (or was) that he does so. There is no need to insist here on the inconveniences of such a method, had it been adopted; it would have led to hallucinations of every sort. Sad experience has shown how easily men may be led to think that they are inspired. But apart from any other reason, an individualistic revelation seems antecedently improbable because it would not be in keeping with what we know of God's providential dealings with mankind. God deals with man according to his nature; and man is naturally social. This being so, we should have expected God to make his revelation to men as a body; and such in fact was the case.

"God spoke to the fathers [i.e., to the ancestors of the Jews whom S Paul was addressing] by the prophets." Whether by

Heb. i I. Matt. xxviii 20.

visions, or by an interior illumination of the mind, or by the ministry of angels, God entrusted his message to certain chosen men, who in their turn were to deliver it to God's chosen people. Of that chosen people would be born Christ, the Word Incarnate, who was to complete the divine message and found on earth a universal kingdom in which God's word would be carried to the ends of the earth until the end of time.

But God's message must be authenticated, his messenger must present his credentials. In vain will the seer claim divine authority if he cannot vindicate his mission. Hence that all men might know that the words of the prophet were the words of God, he marked their teaching with unmistakable signs of its divine origin. "They will not believe me," protested Moses, "nor hear my voice, but they will say: The Lord hath not appeared to thee. . . . And the Lord said: Cast thy rod down upon the ground. He cast it down, and it was turned into a serpent . . . that they may believe, saith he, that the Lord God . . . hath appeared to thee." Leaving to its proper place 2 the discussion of miracles and prophecies as motives of credibility, we must remark here on the consistent appeal made by God's messengers to these irrefragable

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Exod. iv t. <sup>2</sup> Chapter iv.

#### SUPERNATURAL REVELATION

evidences of their divine authority. Suffice it to quote the words of the greatest of all the prophets, the Son of God himself: "Go and relate what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them." In answer to the Jews who ask him to say plainly if he is indeed the Christ, he says: "I speak to you, and you believe not; the works that I do in the name of my Father, they give testimony of me." Finally, we read of the Apostles of Christ who "going forth preached everywhere; the Lordsworking withal, and confirming the word with signs that followed." "

The revelation which God made to his chosen people was a gradual one. Speaking to them "at sundry times," he suited his message to the degree of culture and the condition of his hearers. The promise that God would send a Redeemer was made at the very beginning, and that hope, fostered by repeated revelations through the Patriarchs and Prophets, was the heart and centre of the Jewish religion. Belief in the one true God was safeguarded by constant divine warnings against the idolatry of the surrounding nations

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xi 4-5.

8 Mark xvi 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> John x 24; cf. ibid., 37-38; xi 41-42.

and by detailed instructions for the manner of divine worship. The precepts of the natural law were fully expounded in the Commandments and enforced by legal sanctions. Gradually in the books of the Old Testament beliefs concerning the future life, at first fragmentary and crude, become more and more detailed and definite. Of the great mysteries of Christianity, the Incarnation and the Trinity, we find little more than mere traces-traces, however, which become clearer and clearer as the fulness of time approaches. It was a period of preparation and expecta-tion, during which truths were successively revealed according as they served to prepare men's hearts to receive him who was to come. But this progressive unfolding of God's providential plan was not to be indefinitely prolonged. At last Christ came, and with him the completion of God's message of mercy.

The Son of God became man and, living in the midst of men, showed by his fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies that he was indeed the divine messenger whom all generations had expected; and of his divine mission he gave still further proof—if further was needed—by the wonders that he worked. The prophets of old had conveyed God's word to the chosen people alone; Christ's

### SUPERNATURAL REVELATION

message was for the whole world. Their revelation was but partial, to be supplemented by those who should come after; his was definitive and complete. They were the creatural mouthpieces of God; he, while truly man, was God himself.

To the Jews first he preached his gospel, to the nation which throughout its history had been so signally favoured by God; and by these he was rejected. But from the beginning of his ministry he laid the foundations of his Church, collecting a chosen band of disciples who were to be witnesses of his gospel, not merely in Palestine, but throughout the whole world; they were his twelve Apostles. These with infinite care and patience he trained for their important mission; to these he revealed "the mysteries of the kingdom of God" so far as they were then able to bear them, promising that when he should leave them he would send the Holy Ghost, who would teach them all truth. To these, under the primacy of Peter, he gave special powers: a teaching authority such that to hear them was to hear Christ himself, that they should preach in its integrity the doctrine that they had received from his lips; powers of jurisdiction over all believers, that they might govern Christ's spiritual kingdom on earth.

In this way the Catholic Church was

instituted, the visible, infallible society in which and through which the revelation of Christ was to be preserved and propagated. The Church, the mystical body of Christ, was to perpetuate his work, to bear witness to the truth until the consummation of the world. As the doctrine of Christ was the doctrine of the Father who sent him, so the teaching of the Church is the teaching of Christ who instituted her. Just as Christ had proved his divine mission, so the Church bears in the sight of all men the manifest marks of her divine origin. "The Church herself," says the Vatican Council,1 "by reason of her wonderful extension, eminent holiness and inexhaustible fruitfulness in all good things, her Catholic unity and invincible stability, is ... an irrefutable witness to her own divine mission."

Loc. cit., chapter iii.

# CHAPTER IV

#### THE PRELIMINARIES TO FAITH

Having studied the need, the nature and the manner of divine revelation, we now possess the elements necessary to understand the act whereby that revelation is accepted, the act of faith; and if in the chapters which precede points of doctrine have been touched upon which are treated more fully elsewhere in this series, it has been in order to provide data for the solution of the problem before us.

In fact, the nature of the act of faith has already been insinuated by what has been said about revelation. Revelation is a divine testimony. But if God has spoken, if he has testified to the truth of a statement, then it is man's bounden duty to accept it by an act of belief, by an act of faith. For our present purpose, then, it will be sufficient to describe the act of faith as that act whereby, on the authority of God, we give mental assent to a truth which he has revealed. All that is implied in such an act will form the subject of the succeeding chapter, but here it should be noted that the motive of assent is not the intrinsic evidence of the statement itself, but

the authority of God who makes it; in other words, I believe simply because God has said it. Already it becomes clear that the act of faith cannot be made without certain preliminaries. A motive, before it can give rise to an act, must first be perceived by the mind; the authority of God, then, must be known before I can make an act of faith. I must know that there is a God, and that he has the authority-i.e., the knowledge and the veracity—which is to command my assent. Moreover, by the act of faith I give my assent not merely to a vague generalisation-"whatever it may be that God has revealed"-but to a definite truth, or body of truth, which I know to have been revealed. A further preliminary, therefore, is to know "the fact of revelation"-i.e., that God has revealed this or that truth to which I am required to give my assent.

We begin to see, then, that the act of faith is no "step in the dark." Faith is not an unreasonable credulity; still less is it a blind instinct to believe whatever one is told. Man is a rational being, and God does not call upon him to do anything ill-befitting his nature. It is reasonable, prudent, to believe what one is told by a trustworthy witness. It is imprudent, and even foolish, to believe a statement purporting to be made by one

whose existence is unknown, or at the best doubtful, or of whose knowledge and veracity. even if he exists, one has little or no guarantee. S Thomas Aquinas has been accused of being a Rationalist, but indeed he only vindicates the just rights of a reasonable being when he says: "Man would not believe (revealed truth) unless he saw that he must believe it." 1 Hence, before a man can reasonably and prudently believe a statement, that statement must be credible to him; he must have "evidence of credibility." That evidence of credibility he obtains from the knowledge of those preliminary truths which we have enumerated, called for the sake of convenience the "preambles of faith."

How are we to know these preambles? Should we not, some have suggested, rely for this knowledge on the authority of God himself, so that not only the act of faith but also its foundations should rest upon the firm ground of God's infallible truth? Even granting for the sake of argument, say the Fideists, that the existence of God and the fact of revelation can be discovered by the unaided human mind, yet even the Catholic Church is forced to admit that without revelation man finds it practically impossible to learn natural truths with certainty. Is our

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Sum. Theol., II-II, Q. 1, Art. 4 ad 2.

faith, then, to rest upon so insecure a foundation? It needs little reflection to see that such a process involves a vicious circle; and, far from strengthening the foundations of faith, removes them altogether. How can I reasonably rely upon the authority of God when he reveals to me his existence, his omniscience, his veracity, the fact that he has revealed this or that truth, unless I am antecedently and independently of that same authority convinced that the revealing and truthful God exists? Others have had recourse either to a blind instinct, or to an act of will, to bring about adherence to these preliminary truths.

All such systems betray that distrust of the human reason to which we referred in our second chapter. The Church, we repeat, has no sympathy with those who disparage the powers of the human mind; nor is there any antagonism between reason and faith. In the words of a famous preacher, "they are two sisters who dwell together in the same home. The hospitable doors of our soul are opened to receive these two daughters of God. Faith dwells on high, reason a little lower. But faith will never kill her sister; she will not betray the hospitality accorded her to reign alone in the palace of them both." 1

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Monsabré: Introduction, Conf. II.

"The use of reason," says the Church in condemning Traditionalism, "precedes faith and must lead us to it." 1

The human mind, then, must discover for itself the truths which are the basis of faith, and these must be known with certainty. It is not enough to conjecture with some degree of probability that there is a veracious God who has made a revelation. While doubt concerning the preambles of faith remains the act of faith cannot be reasonable. No man believes reasonably unless he sees that he must believe.

But how are all men to acquire this certainty? In the first place it is to be remarked that the existence of God, at least, can be certainly known by the light of human reason. In fact, so clear are the indications of this truth that the Gentiles were upbraided by S Paul as inexcusable for failing to recognize it. Moreover, the arguments which prove the existence of God show also that he is all perfection, and therefore omniscient and incapable of deceiving. As to the third preamble, the fact of revelation, we have seen that God accompanied his message with clear signs of its divine origin, particularly by miracles and prophecies, and that, moreover, the Catholic Church, founded by Christ for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Denzinger, Enchiridion, 1626.

the specific purpose of teaching men what God has revealed, bears upon her unmistakable marks of her divine institution.

To set in full relief the arguments which show the divine origin of the Christian religion—to expound, in other words, the "motives of credibility"—is the function of the apologist, and therefore lies outside our scope. These motives are many and varied; among them are some which alone are fully convincing, other which convince only by their accumulated force; some will appeal to all minds, others will appeal only to a few. It is just, therefore, to that extent, that the apologist should accommodate his procedure to the mentality of those whom he seeks to persuade. But of the absolute efficacy of at least one motive of credibility no Catholic may doubt, since it has been made the subject of an infallible definition in the Vatican Council, namely, miracles worked in confirmation of a divine mission. "Anathema to him who says ... that by miracles the divine origin of the Christian religion is not rightly proved." 1 In the corresponding chapter the Council goes further; it declares that miracles and prophecies. 2 "are most certain signs of divine

1 Of faith, can. 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>I make no distinction here between miracles and prophecies, since the value of each, mutatis mutandis, is equal in

revelation, and suitable to the intelligence of all." They are suited to the intelligence of the learned as to that of the ignorant, to that of the scientist as to that of the layman, to the modern mind, too often supposed to be infallible, no less than to the mind of the ancients, too often presumed to be lacking in common sense.

That a miracle, granted the existence of God, is possible is shown elsewhere. If a true miracle, which is the work of God alone, is performed by a man as a sign that his teaching is divine, it argues an extraordinary intervention of divine power to vindicate his claim, and, since the true God cannot confirm falsehood, the argument is peremptory. His statement is thus rendered credible on the divine authority. It may not, however, be superfluous to add that the miracle as such does nothing more. It is not a direct proof of the statement made; it is a completely adequate motive of credibility.

The human mind, then, is able to learn with certainty the existence of God; is able, by the proper investigation of the facts, to conclude that Christ is the bearer of a divine

Divine Providence, vol. vii, pp. 31 ff.

showing the divine mission of the wonder-worker or the prophet. In fact, a prophecy may well be called a miracle of the intellectual order.

message, that he founded an infallible Church for the purpose of propagating that message; and finally, by the process indicated in apologetics, to conclude that the Catholic Church is that divinely appointed teacher of revelation. These things, I say, can be known and proved, and by those who have the requisite leisure, opportunity and ability, are actually known and proved with all the scientific certainty of which the subject is patient. The preambles of faith, therefore, rest upon

the solid ground of human reason.

But while the human mind can satisfy itself by rational demonstration of the existence of God, by historical investigation of the "fact of revelation," it remains true that for a great proportion of the human race such a process of scientific demonstration is a practical impossibility. A secure conviction that a good God exists is obtainable by all men, and by the large majority is actually obtained. But how many are able, besides justifying that conviction to themselves, to construct a scientific proof of the existence of God which satisfies all the demands of human reason, with all the apparatus of objection and answer which is needed by the modern apologist? Most men believe in the existence of God because they have satisfied themselves, by reasons which for them are

sufficient, that God really does exist. Again. the divine origin of the Christian religion, the divine character of the Catholic Church, being attested by so many motives of credibility, is known by all Catholics, can be recognised by non-Catholics. But relatively few Catholics have either the leisure or the ability to investigate the historical documents. to sift for themselves the evidence required for a scientific historical demonstration: relatively few non-Catholics would have the opportunity of thus verifying the claims of the Catholic Church. Moreover, the difficulty in the way of such scientific certitude is infinitely increased when we consider the condition of the uneducated and the young. Can these make no act of faith until they have completed a course of philosophy, until they have satisfied their minds by answering every objection that can be made against the existence of God, proved the divinity of the Christian religion by a rigid demonstration, and thus arrived at perfect evidence concerning the preambles of faith?

Such perfect scientific evidence is unnecessary. The reason why one must, before believing a statement, be convinced of the existence and trustworthiness of the witness who makes it, is that otherwise the assent given would be unreasonable, imprudent.

Thus it is imprudent to believe a statement supposed to have been made even by a most knowledgeable and trustworthy person, if there is reasonable doubt as to his having made it.

I say advisedly, if there is reasonable doubt, because there are doubts which are unreasonable, imprudent. Nowadays, at any rate, whatever may have been the case years ago, it is unreasonable to doubt the safety of travelling by rail. It is imprudent to doubt a proposition which you have clearly demonstrated simply because an objection is made to it which, by reason of your lack of ability or technical knowledge, you are unable to solve. In fine, without going into the vexed question of certitude and its various kinds, we may remark that there is a state of mind which a reasonable man demands before he will engage upon any serious undertaking. Call it moral certitude if you will; I prefer to call it a prudent conviction. Complete scientific evidence in many cases, either for circumstantial or personal reasons, he cannot have. He asks those who are competent to know, in whose judgement he has full confidence, and with the conviction thus obtained he sets out upon his task. Absolutely speaking, he may have been deceived; but in the circumstances he acted prudently; it would

have been imprudent, unreasonable to doubt. And here follows a consequence of vital importance for the solution of our question. What is prudent in some circumstances is imprudent in others; what is prudent for one person is not prudent for another. This state of mind, which I have called "prudent conviction," is not absolute but relative. So, for example, it is prudent for the unlearned to believe implicitly the teaching of those who "ought to know." A child acts prudently on the advice, however misguided, of his mother. School-children believe what their teachers, however incompetent, teach them; and to act upon such information is prudent and reasonable-for children. In fact, they would be imprudent to act otherwise.

And now let us apply these principles to the question before us. In order to make a reasonable act of faith the prospective believer must achieve a prudent conviction concerning the preambles of faith: a conviction—i.e., he must be convinced of the existence of God and the fact of revelation: a prudent conviction—i.e., there must be no

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Obviously this view has nothing in common with the theory of "relative truth," according to which a proposition objectively true to one is false to another. I am speaking here not of objective truth but of a subjective state of mind.

reasonable doubt. Such a state of mind, then, is compatible with unreasonable doubts such as we have exemplified above. Thus a child who learns from his teacher, or from his Catechism, that there is a God who has revealed certain truths through his Church, of which the parish priest is an official representative, has a prudent conviction regarding the preambles sufficient for a reasonable act of divine faith. Again, motives of credibility which would not convince the scientist, to the unlearned may carry a conviction upon which he could prudently rely. Hence, a scientific demonstration of the preambles, so far from being a necessary preliminary to a reasonable act of faith, is in most cases impossible; in those cases, therefore, it would be unreasonable to demand it.

Nevertheless, in all cases the legitimate demands of reason are met. Reason demands that no man believe a thing unless he see it to be credible. Even in the case of the child, even in the case of the unlearned, whatever be the objective reliability of his grounds for admitting the existence of God or the fact of revelation, the conclusion to which he is led—namely, the judgement of credibility—is perfectly evident. He concludes that it is evidently reasonable to believe on the authority of God a truth, or a group

of truths, which he is prudently convinced that God has revealed. But it should be carefully noted, even now, that the motives which have led to the "judgement of credibility" are not the motive of faith. The act of faith remains yet to be made, and its motive is quite distinct; it is the authority of God who reveals.

When the inquirer has reached the stage at which he regards revealed truth as "credible," when, further, he has realised his obligation to believe, he is on the threshold of faith. But before we consider the act of faith itself, we have still to take into account other important factors in the approach to it. In what has been said hitherto we have considered only the intellectual activity of man; and we have purposely confined our attention to this aspect of the question in order to stress the essentially reasonable character of submission to divine revelation. But man is not a mental machine. When he thinks of a subject he does so because he wills to think of it. As we shall see later, the will plays a prominent and essential part in the act of faith itself. But also in the preparation for faith good-will is absolutely necessary. Moreover, man has various emotions and desires which to a greater or less extent are under his control; these too must be taken

into account. It is not simply the human mind that prepares itself for faith; it is the whole man, a vital unity, with all the complex interaction of his mental, volitional, and

emotional powers.

The first thing necessary in the approach to faith is attention to the subject of religion; the inquirer must first make up his mind to think about God and his duties in God's regard. And here, besides the effort of will, the emotional factor may well enter to attract or to repel. Some have begun their inquiry simply out of affection for a Catholic friend whose good opinion they valued; others have desisted when they saw that such inquiry would lead to self-denial. Some have been first attracted to the Catholic Church by the beauty of her ceremonial; others have been repelled by the squalor of an ill-kept church. Thus the most insignificant circumstance may exert its effect, inclining a man this way or that; but finally it is the will that directs the mind to God.

But not only in the initial impulse, throughout the preliminary stages too, these factors exert their influence. Distractions must be firmly set aside that the mind may devote its attention to a serious and difficult subject; prejudices must be overcome so that the full force of the motives of credibility may be

appreciated; the temptation to dally with sophistical objections when they are seen to be groundless must be suppressed; unworthy considerations of self-interest, pride and human respect must be excluded lest they interfere with the earnest inquiry after truth. In short, there are innumerable ways in which desires and feelings may help or hinder man in his preparation for faith. The will cannot make a thing to be true which is false; the will cannot give force to an invalid argument. But it can and must prevent extraneous considerations from obscuring the issue, and exclude from the mind anything that may distract a serene and unbiassed attention to the arguments proposed. In the study of a purely speculative subject there is little danger of such interference; one is not liable to unreasonable prejudices in the solution of an algebraic problem. But religion is vitally connected with man's moral duties, and for that very reason a purely unprejudiced and rational study of it is particularly difficult. If a man is to devote himself to it wholeheartedly and with unruffled mind, he needs above all things good-will.

There remains the last, and yet really the first and most important factor. With the intellect of a Plato, with the iron self-control of a Stoic, with all the good-will of which man

is capable, he can do nothing to prepare himself for faith without the help of God's grace. "No man cometh to me unless the Father draw him." Man's destiny is a supernatural one, entirely beyond his natural powers to achieve. His acts, to be salutary that is, to be conductive to his eternal salvation—must be supernatural, must have a quality, a modality, which raises them above their natural power and value, making them proportionate to a supernatural end. It is by the act of faith that man first sets himself in the path of salvation, and, as will be seen, that act must be supernatural. But even before this vital step is taken man must be guided by God's grace. God's supernatural providence, which wills all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. watches over all men, guiding them gently, but surely, to himself. The child who learns his religion from his mother, whose mind is gradually opened to the wonders of God's revelation, is acting under the impulse of God's grace. The unbeliever who becomes conscious of a desire to know God, who earnestly and perseveringly, in spite of obstacles, seeks after the truth, is being led, enlightened and inspired by supernatural grace. The eloquence of S Paul would not

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See vol. xvii: Actual Grace, chap. iii.

have converted a Lydia had the grace of God not opened her heart to hear his words. The Apostle may plant the seed and tend it carefully, but it will not grow unless God give the increase.<sup>1</sup>

In all these preliminaries, therefore, man must do his part. He must endeavour with good-will to see that God's truth is credible: it is his duty and his right as a rational being. But he must not rely upon himself. "Our sufficiency is from God." 2 His very goodwill must derive from him who "worketh in us both to will and to accomplish." 3 The urge of passion, a deep-seated prejudice, a whole complex of circumstances for which he may be but partly, or even in no degree responsible, may blind him to the truth. For such a one the grace of enlightenment is at hand, if he will but accept it. His prayer must be that of the blind man: "Lord, that I may see." The answer and the result will be the same: "And immediately he saw, and followed him." 4

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Cf. Acts xvi 14; 1 Cor. iii 4-6 <sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. iii 5. <sup>8</sup> Phil. ii 13. <sup>4</sup> Cf. Matt. xx 30-34.

### CHAPTER V

#### THE ACT OF FAITH

In our previous chapter we accompanied the believer in his progress towards the act of faith until the stage at which, having acquired a firm conviction concerning the preambles of faith, he forms an evident "judgement of credibility": "This truth, which I am convinced has been revealed by God, is to be believed on God's authority." Passing to a judgement of the practical order, he says: "I must believe it." Then, and not till then, he proceeds to give his assent to the revealed truth: "I believe this truth because God has revealed it." This assent is the act of divine faith which we must now study.

The subject is of such vital importance that our definition of the act of faith must be taken from the infallible pronouncement of the Vatican Council. The Council directly defines the virtue of faith, but in doing so it necessarily defines the act: "Faith . . . is a supernatural virtue whereby, inspired and assisted by the grace of God, we believe that the things which he has revealed are true; not because the intrinsic truth of the things

is plainly perceived by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, and who can neither be deceived nor deceive."

Faith, then, is an act whereby we believe something to be true. It is an assent to truth, and therefore an act of the intellect: for truth is the object of the intellect.1 There is, however, this important difference between the assent of faith and the assent of immediate knowledge. The assent in the latter case is caused by the perception of the inward truth of the statement: so that when it is made I say: "I see; of course, that must be so"; and, when once the truth is seen, nothing further is required to gain my assent. In the case of faith, I see indeed-otherwise there could be no assent-but I do not see within the truth itself. I understand the terms of the revealed proposition, but neither the analysis of those terms nor my own experience assures me that they should be connected. The ground, or the "motive," of my assent to the proposition is extrinsical to it, and that motive is the authority of God, who tells me that it is true. In both cases there is evidence: in the former the evidence is intrinsic, in the latter it is extrinsic. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Cf. the oath against Modernism: "Faith . . . is a true act of the intellect."

believer sees the truth, say S Thomas, "as credible; . . . for he would not believe unless he saw that he must believe." 1

I have said that when once the inward truth of a proposition is seen, nothing further is required to evoke the assent of the mind; it is drawn of necessity to adhere to its connatural object. But without that internal evidence the mind, of itself, is powerless to assent. "Faith," says S Paul, "is the evidence of things that appear not." 2 Revealed truth is not seen in itself; it is seen as credible, as clothed, so to speak, in the garment of divine authority. Invested with such authority, it becomes indeed a fit object for intellectual acceptance; but the intellect alone, eager to "read within" (intus-legere) the truth, makes no spontaneous move to accept it. It is here that the intervention of the will becomes necessary. It has been seen in the previous chapter that the will has an important function in the preliminaries to faith. To arrive at the judgement of credibility the believer must focus his attention upon the motives of credibility and set aside all that might distract from their unbiassed consideration. All this needs a firm and constant effort of will. But in these pre-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> II-II, Q. 1, Art. iv ad 2.

liminary stages the will has no direct causative influence upon the assent of the mind. The intervention of the will in the act of faith itself is of a different and more direct character. The act of faith, though, as we have seen, it is elicited by the mind, is caused by an act of will. By faith, says the Vatican Council, "man yields a voluntary obedience to God himself." The mind sees the revealed truth as credible, and the will bends the mind

to accept it.

Now it is important at once to preclude a possible misunderstanding of the function of the will in the act of faith. The will cannot make the mind believe anything it chooses; it is not that "the wish is father to the thought." Before the mind can accept a statement, even at the behest of the will, the statement must be "credible"; it must be attested by a trustworthy witness; and, moreover, it must not be nonsense. Nonsense is meaningless and can have no relation to the mind. Briefly, a revealed statement can be accepted by the mind provided that it fulfils the conditions necessary to render it credible

¹ This, of course, is true only of those preambles of which rational demonstration is given. If the preambles are accepted —as they often are—on human testimony, then the function of the will is the same as in every act of faith, whether human or divine.

—i.e., fit for intellectual acceptance. It is seen to be not unfit for acceptance because it has an intelligible meaning; it is seen to be positively fit for acceptance because it is attested by an infallible witness. In fact, since the witness in this case is God himself, who has a right to our homage and obedience, the fitness is presented as a positive duty.

The will therefore now deliberately intervenes and commands the assent of the mind to revealed truth; and the motive of the act is the authority of God which attests that truth. This motive, it should be remarked, is one which appeals to both mind and will, but under different aspects. To the mind it appeals as endowing the statement with credibility; to the will it appeals as a divine perfection to be worshipped: his love in revealing to be repaid by a loving acceptance on our part, his wisdom and his veracity to be adored by an unquestioning homage.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>The act of faith, therefore, involves an act of trust, of confidence in God's authority. But this trust is not the act of faith itself; it is anterior to it because it belongs to the motive of my assent. As a consequence of my faith in what God has revealed I may then make a further act of confidence in God that he pardons my sins; this is an act of hope. The Protestant error concerning the "faith that justifies" consists in confusing hope with the faith which it presupposes. But see vol. xvi: Sanctifying Grace.

"Since man," says the Council which is our infallible guide in this matter, "is utterly dependent upon God as upon his Creator and Lord, and since created reason is absolutely subject to uncreated Truth, we are bound, by faith in his revelation, to yield to him the full homage of our intellect and will." Hence, althought the act of faith is an intellectual act, yet it is also an act of homage which is in the power of the will to withhold. By faith "man yields free obedience to God." To explain the freedom and other properties of faith, it is necessary to examine a little more closely the precise nature of its motive, the authority of God.<sup>2</sup>

It might seem at first sight that if a man is firmly convinced that a statement has been made by one who is certainly telling the

<sup>1</sup> Chapter iii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Here a preliminary remark may not be out of place. As in many matters of theology, where it is a question of explanations, so in this matter theologians differ. The explanation of the act of faith involves the science of psychology which, although, or perhaps because, it deals with ourselves, is full of difficulties and mysteries. It is fair, therefore, to warn the reader that while all Catholics are agreed—as they must be—that the motive of faith is the authority of God, not all are agreed as to the manner in which this should be explained. The view here put forward appears to the writer a reasonable one, and is held by many theologians of repute.

truth, then he cannot possibly withhold his assent to it; nor is it apparent that such assent would be an act of homage to his informant. If a man accused of murder admits a fact which is damaging to his case, the jurygranted that they find no other reason for his admission-cannot but believe his testimony. And apart from all discussion as to the freedom of such an assent, by no conceivable standard could such belief be termed a homage to the veracity of the witness. The jury accept his statement because they know that in the circumstances it must be true. Of a like nature is the credence that we may give to an historian whom, however otherwise unreliable, we have proved by the application of tests to be here and now telling the truth. Critical students of history rely upon human testimony, but their acceptance of it implies no personal compliment to the narrator of the event. They believe that this happened because, and in so far as, they know that he is saying what is true. Is not the case the same with the act of divine faith? I know that God has revealed the Trinity. I know that God is Truth itself. Surely the logical conclusion is inevitable: the Trinity is true. Here is no free acceptance of God's word, no free homage to his Person. I am forced by the laws of evidence.

But there is a radical difference between the assent of divine faith and the assent given under the circumstances above described. The jury believe the witness, the historian believes his informant, because and in so far as they know him to be relating what is in conformity with reality. The motive of their assent is the evidence that they have of the truth of the statement; and such assent is probably not deliberate; it is certainly no personal compliment to the witness. The believer accepts a revealed truth not precisely because he knows that God has revealed it and knows that God is infallible. Such knowledge is the necessary condition, but it is not the motive, of his faith. He believes because God, who is infallible, has said it. The difference is perhaps subtle, but it is important. The motive of the act of divine faith is not my knowledge of that authority as accrediting revealed truth, however certain, however evident that knowledge may be, but the divine authority itself. My knowledge is finite, my knowledge is fallible. God's authority is infinite; God can neither deceive nor be deceived. If, when I believe, I rely upon my knowledge, I rely upon what is human; if I rely upon God's authority I rely upon what is divine. In the act of divine faith the believer abstracts from the argu-

ments which have led him to the judgement of credibility. They were a necessary preliminary; they were, if you will, the tinder that lit the torch. But the torch burns now by its own brilliance; the light of God's authority illumines revealed truth with its infinite radiance; and this is the motive of faith: I believe because God has said it. Reason has led me to faith. Reason has told me that God's revealed word is credible, and in accordance with her advice I freely and unreservedly submit myself to the guidance of his Truth.

An instructive incident in the life of our Lord illustrates the nature of divine faith. The Pharisees, as is well known, were constantly rebuked by our Lord for their unbelief. They had seen, as others had seen, evident signs that Christ spoke the words of God; and yet they stubbornly refused to believe him. One day after they had made one of their frequent attempts to discredit him,1 he took a little child and said: "Amen I say to you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child, shall not enter it." 2 The act of divine faith has more in common with the trusting belief of a child in his mother, than with the assent of the critical historian. For the child it is enough

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xix 3. <sup>2</sup> Mark x 15.

to know that his mother has said it, and he believes on that authority. His assent is a prudent one, for he has motives of credibility which for him are sufficient; everything leads him reasonably to suppose that his mother knows everything and would not deceive him. But when he believes, he believes simply and solely because his mother has said it. He does not advert to the reasons which have led him to regard his mother as trustworthy. His belief is an unaffected and trusting homage of love to his mother. So also in the Act of Faith which every Catholic child recites: "O my God, I believe . . . be-cause thou hast said it, and thy word is true." To the motives of credibility the child does not advert; he has probably forgotten them. But the motives of credibility are not the motives of his faith. He relies not upon them, but upon the authority of God itself. What is true of the child is true of the Christian adult; and this the experience of each will confirm. When he makes an act of faith, he thinks not of the proofs of the existence of God, not of the miracles which Christ worked, but of the authority of God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

This is why faith is a "theological" virtue; this is why faith is an act of free obedience to

God; this, finally, is the reason of its sov-

ereign certitude.

The certainty of faith is supreme because the believer's assurance rests upon a ground more secure than all human science, upon the infallible authority of God. "If we receive the testimony of man," says S John,1 "the testimony of God is greater;" in-finitely, unspeakably greater, since God is very Truth. But as in regard to the freedom of the act of faith, so also in regard to its certainty a difficulty often arises from a misconception of the precise motive of faith. It is sometimes urged that since no chain is stronger than its weakest link, therefore the assent of faith can enjoy no greater certainty than the assent given to any of the preambles of faith which are its foundation. Metaphors are misleading here. Even the word "foundation" may lend itself to misunderstanding. The preambles of faith are the foundation of faith in the sense that they are a necessary prerequisite. But they are not its foundation in the sense of supplying the security of the edifice. The metaphor of the chain is no less fallacious. There is no continuous "chain" of reasoning that leads from the first argument which proves the existence of God to the truth, for example, that in one God there

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 1 John v 9-10.

are three Persons. If the act of faith were the logical conclusion of such a chain, then evidently that conclusion could have no greater weight than is warranted by the series of arguments that lead to it. But, I repeat, the act of faith is not an inference from pre-

ceding arguments.

The series of truths which we have called the preambles of faith leads logically to the judgement of credibility, but no further. I aver, in view of my previous reasoning, that it is reasonable, prudent, in fact obligatory, to believe that, e.g., there are three Persons in one God. I then proceed, impelled not by my previous reasoning, but by God's authority, to believe it. I believe it, not precisely because and in so far as I know that God has revealed it, but because God has revealed it. Hence the firmness of my assent is measured not by the cogency of any one, or indeed of the sum, of the reasons which led me to judge the truth as credible, but by the infinite weight of the divine authority which is the motive of my faith.

But although the certainty of faith is supreme, supreme as is the divine authority upon which it is based, yet the mind of the believer is not completely satisfied. Under the influence of the will it holds firmly to the truth; but within the truth it does not

see; and nothing save vision can satisfy the mind. Faith is an evidence-i.e., a firm conviction—but it is a conviction "of things that appear not." As long, then, as intrinsic evidence is denied, the mental assent is not spontaneous and requires the concurrence of the will. Hence it is misleading to compare the state of mind of the believer with the complete repose of the mind in a truth clearly demonstrated, or with the evidence of the senses. In the latter case there can be little or no temptation to doubt. The believer, on the other hand, precisely because he does not see within the truth, may be subject to many such temptations. But temptations are not doubts, and the believer is able by an effort of will to dispel them, to concentrate his attention upon the infallible motive of his faith, and thus to achieve a state of security from error as superior to that of human knowledge as the Truth of God infinitely transcends the fallible reason of man.

The whole process of the act of faith, such as we have described it, does not seem, absolutely speaking, to exceed man's natural powers. If we consider those powers in the abstract, there seems to be no reason why, granted that God has made a revelation, man should not be able for himself to investigate

the preambles of faith, naturally to recognise his obligation to accept it, and finally to believe on God's authority the truths that he has revealed. But even if we grant this to be physically possible, we have seen that the difficulties which occur even in the preliminary stages are such as to render it extremely unlikely of achievement, without the help of God's grace. When, moreover, we consider that the act of faith, being the initial step in man's progress towards his supernatural end, must itself be supernatural, the need for grace becomes quite imperative.

We must now, therefore, give our attention to those words of the Vatican definition which we have hitherto neglected. "This faith," says the Council, "which is the beginning of man's salvation, is a supernatural virtue, whereby, inspired and assisted by God's grace, we believe," etc. And later in the same chapter, quoting the Council of Orange (529), the Council asserts the absolute impossibility of a salutary faith "without the illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who gives to all men sweetness in accepting and believing the truth."

Grace is necessary for the act of faith, in the first place, to make it supernatural; to give it that quality which makes it conducive to a supernatural end, in other words, to

make it salutary. If that supernatural character is needed—as we have seen that it is even in the preliminary steps to faith, still more is it needed in the very act by which man submits to God's authority. "By grace," says S Paul,1 "you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God." For faith man must strive to his utmost: he must use all human endeavour to learn the truth and to submit to it. But all his striving, all his endeavour, would be utterly useless without the grace of God. He might even-we have surmised that it is not impossible—make an act of faith unaided: but that act would not serve for his salvation unless it were made under the inspiration and assistance of God's grace. It must be inspired by grace. God does not wait until man conceives the desire to believe; he puts that desire supernaturally in his heart. It must be assisted by God's grace. In the very act of submission to God's truth, the mind is enlightened, the will is strengthened by God, who works in us "to will and to accomplish."

The grace of God is essential; but to none is it ever lacking. If even during man's progress towards faith God enlightens the mind and strengthens the will, anticipating

every act with his grace, still more abundantly, when the act of faith itself is to be made, will God give his supernatural help. It is not the lack of grace that man should dread, but

rather his own power to resist it.

But grace does more than make the act of faith supernatural; it renders it easy and delightful. The Holy Spirit gives "sweetness in believing." Grace enlightens the mind, setting in vivid relief the desirability of paying intellectual homage to God, giving to it a supernatural insight into the meaning even of mysteries, and into the treasures of grace and glory which will be the reward of our faith. Grace helps the will to adhere firmly to God's word, putting aside all considerations of self-interest, all distractions of worldly things, to cleave to God, the inexhaustible source of every good.<sup>1</sup>

In the fullest sense of the term, therefore, faith is God's gift. Hence it is for man to treasure and preserve it. Until we see God face to face the mind will be restive, and temptations to doubt will be frequent. The will must be prompt to reject them, and in this task man has always the abundant help

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The effects which, in those who have the supernatural virtue of faith, proceed from that virtue are produced in others by actual grace. Cf. vol. xviii: The Supernatural Virtues, chap. ii, § 1.

of God's grace. He who has once committed himself to the keeping of God's Truth need not fear that he will be deserted in time of temptation. But he must do his part. He must take all those measures which are humanly possible to guard his treasure against attack. The mind of man is fickle; error seduces by its very novelty, sophistical reasoning by its display of ingenuity. The Church, therefore, while she encourages her more learned children to study, in order to refute, the written works of those who attack the faith, wisely forbids the dissemination, and above all the indiscriminate reading, of such books. She knows well that many who have the intelligence to understand an objection have not the ability to find, or even to understand, its answer; that not all the faithful have the leisure or the power to meet reason with reason and learning with learning, and to rebut the objections so lightly made.

Those of the faithful who are troubled with such difficulties will do well to meditate upon these infallible words of the Vatican Council: "Although faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason; since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind, and God

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cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth. The false appearance of such contradiction is mainly due, either to the dogmas of faith not having been understood and expounded according to the mind of the Church, or to the inventions of opinion having been taken for the verdicts of reason." 1

A further duty regarding perseverance in faith arises from what was said in our previous chapter. It was there established that in order that the act of faith may be reasonably made it is sufficient to have a conviction concerning the preambles which, relatively to the circumstances of the individual, is prudent. But what is the duty of the child when he grows to manhood and discovers—as he may—that the motives upon which he relied for his judgement of credibility no longer satisfy him? Is he to give up his faith until he has once more gone over the preliminary ground and satisfied himself concerning the preambles?

The answer of the Church as far as Catholics are concerned is peremptory: a Catholic can never have a just reason for rejecting the faith that he has once embraced. And the first reason of this is that the Catholic has constantly before him an absolutely, and not merely a relatively, sufficient motive of

<sup>1</sup> Chapter iv.

credibility - namely, the Church herself, divinely instituted, which assures her children "that the faith which they profess rests on the most secure foundation." The second reason is that faith is not only a supernatural gift of God, but is accompanied by the graces necessary to preserve it. God's providence will not allow the faithful to lack the helps which they need to protect their faith. The ever-watchful Father, to whom his children daily pray, "Lead us not into temptation," will never allow them to be in such circumstances that the loss of their faith would be inculpable. Whatever be the greater or lesser degree of blame that may attach in individual cases, whatever be the mysterious means that God may use to protect his faithful ones, it is certain that "God does not abandon us until we first abandon him." 2

It is clear, then, that in this matter the Catholic has serious duties. Not only must he avoid temptations against the faith, not only must be pray for an increase of faith, but he is bound to take care that his mental development in secular branches of study should be accompanied by equal development in the knowledge of his religion. If he feels difficulties regarding fundamentals it is his

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Vatican Council, loc. cit., chap. iii. <sup>2</sup> St Augustine, De natura et gratia, c. 26.

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duty to inquire of those who are able to solve them; and here he needs a humility of mind which recognises that what he does not know is well known to many others. There can be little doubt that many defections from the Church are due to a culpable lack of knowledge—culpable because the ordinary means of information upon this important matter, whether they be Catholic books, sermons, or instructions, have been culpably neglected.

But it is otherwise for those who belong to non-Catholic religious bodies. None of these possesses, or indeed claims exclusively to possess, those characteristic marks of divine institution which so clearly distinguish the Catholic Church. Although members of such bodies may indeed assent by divine faith to some truths which are revealed by God, yet that very grace of faith, which strengthens Catholics in their adherence to the Church which Christ has instituted as the Pillar and the Ground of truth, will lead others to correct their errors and to submit to the infallible teacher of God's word. The essential difference in this matter between the position of Catholics and that of others is that whereas other religious bodies do not claim to be divinely instituted as the only infallible teacher of divine revelation, Catholics by their very faith profess that the Church is

their divinely appointed guide. As Tertullian said to the unbelievers of his day, "We need no curious searchings, when we have Jesus Christ; we need no further inquiry, when we have the gospel. When we believe, we need to believe nothing more. For this we believe at the very beginning, that there is nothing more to believe." <sup>1</sup>

A word in conclusion on the necessity of the act of faith. That in all adults a supernatural act of divine faith is necessary as an indispensable means of salvation, is the doctrine of the Catholic Church, and may be readily inferred from all that has been said concerning faith and supernatural revelation. The primary truth of that revelation is that man is called to a supernatural destiny which consists in the vision of God face to face. Of this destiny man could know nothing without revelation, and knowing nothing could never strive for it. Hence, in all who are able to act rationally and to think for themselves the first and indispensable step towards salvation is their recognition, by an act of divine faith, of God as their supernatural end. "Without faith," says St Paul, "it is impossible to please God." 2 That act of faith, it is clear, must embrace at least implicitly every truth that God has revealed.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> De praescr., c. 8.

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for the motive of faith, the authority of God, applies equally to them all. As to the minimum that must be known, and therefore believed explicitly, so that even its inculpable ignorance would exclude from the hope of salvation, it is commonly held that the two truths mentioned by St Paul 1 are sufficient: "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and is a rewarder of them that seek him." But however few, however many be the truths believed, they must be accepted by an act of faith strictly so called. It is not enough, therefore, to hold, simply because one thinks it reasonable to hold, that there is a God who will reward those who seek him. It is necessary for salvation to hold this because God has revealed it, whatever be the means by which God's word has been made known. And the reason is that the reward which is in store for man is a reward which he could never have expected without God's revelation.

But apart from exceptional cases, it is normally necessary to know and to believe explicitly far more than the two truths mentioned, for Christ has instituted his Church to teach all that God has revealed. And this brings us to the subject of our next chapter.

### CHAPTER VI

THE CHURCH AND THE OBJECT OF FAITH

§ 1.

A NECESSARY condition for the act of faith, as we have seen, is that the believer should know what God has revealed; the object of faith must be presented to him as credible on the divine authority. But it is evident that, so far as the act of divine faith as such is concerned, it matters little by what means it is thus presented. The study of Jewish and Christian literature simply as historical documents may convince a person that certain doctrines are revealed by God; in that case he is bound to believe such doctrines on the authority of God's word. There are undoubtedly many outside the Catholic Church who, inculpably rejecting or not knowing her claim to be the infallible guardian of divine truth, yet believe some Christian doctrines by a supernatural act of divine faith. They have their motives of credibility, they have the assistance of God's grace; they have, in short, all that is necessary for the act of divine faith which we have described.1

<sup>1</sup> See vol. xvii: Actual Grace, pp. 57 seq.

But—and the antithesis is to be noted these are exceptional cases. They presup-pose inculpable ignorance of the Catholic Church, the divinely appointed means for the teaching of revealed truth. Although by God's admirable mercy many outside the Church are enabled providentially to believe some small part of that divine doctrine, yet these must be content, as it were, with crumbs from the table of that rich repast which is spread for those who dwell within. "That we may be able to satisfy the obligation of embracing the true faith and of constantly persevering therein, God has instituted the Church through his only-begotten Son, and has bestowed on it manifest marks of that institution, that it may be recognised by all men as the guardian and teacher of the revealed word." This, then, is the way of approach to God's truth which Christ himself has ordained: a visible Church with a living teaching authority, infallible because the Holy Ghost is with her, preserving her from error.2

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Vatican Council, loc. cit., chap. iii. <sup>2</sup> Cf. vol. xx: The Church on Earth,

### § 2.

The revelation made to the Apostles, by Christ and by the Holy Spirit whom he sent to teach them all truth, was final, definite. To that body of revealed truth nothing has been, or ever will be, added. The duty of the Apostles and their successors was clear: to guard jealously the precious thing committed to their care and to transmit it whole and entire to posterity. "Therefore, brethren," says S Paul, "stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have learned, whether by word or by our epistle." 1 "Hold the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me in faith and in the love which is in Christ Jesus. . . . The things which thou hast heard of me by many witnesses, the same commend to faithful men who shall be fit to teach others also," 2 Hence this important consequence: when the Church teaches that a truth-e.g., the doctrine of original sin-is revealed by God, she does not mean that God has just now revealed it to her; but, in virtue of her office as the infallible custodian and interpreter of God's word, she declares that this truth is contained, and

<sup>1 2</sup> Thess. ii 14.

<sup>2</sup> Tim. i 13; ii 2.

always has been contained, in the deposit of revelation committed to her care. In other words, when the Church teaches a revealed truth she draws upon the "sources" of revelation.

What are these sources? It would be true, in a sense, to say that there is but one source of revelation-namely, divine Traditionunderstanding thereby the body of revealed truth handed down from the Apostles; and it is in this sense that S Paul uses the word when he urges Timothy to "hold the traditions which you have learned, whether by word or by our epistle." Nevertheless, since a great and important part of that tradition was committed to writing and is contained in the inspired books of Holy Scripture, it is the custom of the Church to distinguish two sources of revelation, Tradition and Scripture, the former name being reserved for that body of revealed truth which was not committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, but has been handed down through the living teaching authority of the Catholic Church. We must deal briefly with each.

And first, that oral tradition is a source of revelation distinct from Scripture there is little need to demonstrate. The manner in which Christ instituted his Church is a suffi-

cient indication of this. He instituted a visible society to the rulers of which he gave power to teach infallibly; in other words, he founded a living teaching authority. He may indeed have given his Apostles instructions to write some account of his life on earth, and of the chief points of his teaching; but the Gospels themselves do not tell us so. At any rate not all of them did, or if they did their writings have not come down to us. But he told them explicitly to preach the gospel to every creature; and the accounts that we have of the early Apostolic ministry -and the Pauline texts above quoted-show that it was by oral instruction that the revealed word of God was chiefly propagated. St Paul, in fact, presupposes as a necessary prerequisite for faith the bearing of the word and the preaching of the gospel.1

The Tradition which is a source of revelation is divine Tradition; and this differs from human tradition not only because it is of divine origin, but also in that, unlike its human counterpart, it is divinely guaranteed against corruption and alteration. Daily experience offers examples of statements which, made to one person and by him related to another who, in his turn, relying partly on a faulty memory and largely on a vivid imagination,

relates them with embellishments to a friend, are brought back to the original speaker mutilated, mangled, and unrecognisable. Divine Tradition is authoritative and infallible; infallible because authoritative—that is, transmitted through the teaching authority of the Church, under the assistance of the Holy Ghost.

Circumstances may demand that the Church should exercise her teaching office in a solemn manner, either by an infallible pronouncement of the Head of the Church, by the definitions of an Œcumenical Council, or by the authoritative proposition of some creed or formula of belief; all such statements of doctrine form a part of divine Tradition. Ordinarily, however, the Church teaches the faithful through their more immediate legitimate pastors, and their universal consensus on a point of doctrine—expressed either in official pronouncements, in cate-chisms issued by episcopal authority, or through other channels—is an organ of divine Tradition. Similarly the universal practice of the Church, if it essentially implies a dogmatic truth, is a source of divine revelation. Thus S Augustine rightly pointed to the universal practice of the Church of baptising children as an indication that the doctrine of original sin is dinively

revealed. Moreover, many of the theologians of the early centuries of the Church, conspicuous for their sanctity and learning, are called "Fathers." The consensus of these, similarly, considered as witnesses to the general belief of the Church, is an indication that the truth which they unanimously hold to be divinely revealed is in fact a part of the deposit of faith. The same is true of the consensus of later theologians. For although neither Fathers nor theologians as such represent the teaching authority of the Church, yet they are witnesses to the universal belief of the faithful which is the result of that teaching. Hence, finally, the belief of the faithful themselves, expressed unanimously, is a further indication that a truth is contained in the deposit of faith. For the faithful, considered as a body, believe infallibly what they have been infallibly taught.

The other source of revelation is Sacred Scripture. The books of the Old and New Testaments are held by the Church as sacred, not merely because they contain revealed doctrine, not merely because they are free from error, but because they are the work of God himself. God is their author. This is not the place in which to deal with the important subject of inspiration; it is treated

fully elsewhere in this series. Suffice it to note here that inspiration is a supernatural work of God. Hence we can know nothing of it except from revelation. No natural perfection of a book—e.g., the fact that it contains true and holy doctrines, that its perusal gives rise to pious thoughts—can show it to have been written under the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit. We can know that God is the author of a book only through the testimony either of God himself, or of the writer whom he has used as his instrument, provided that he was conscious of being divinely inspired. In the latter case, unless the sacred writer is able to present divine credentials for his assertion, the testimony is but human and fallible. Whether, therefore, in regard to inspiration in general—that there do in fact exist divinely inspired books, or in regard to the canonicity of the sacred books—that this or that book is divinely inspired, our secure and infallible knowledge can come only from divine revelation. Now we have seen that the complete divine revelation is transmitted to us from Christ through the Apostles in the divine Tradition of the Church. Hence the only certain guide as to the inspiration and canonicity of all the books of Sacred Scripture 1 Vol. v: The Holy Ghost.

is the authoritative pronouncement of the Church. "I should not believe the gospel," says St Augustine, "unless I were impelled thereto by the authority of the Catholic Church." 1

Moreover, since the Church is the divinely appointed custodian of revelation, it is evidently her office to preserve not merely the letter of the Scriptures, but also their meaning. The Church, therefore, is the authentic and infallible interpreter of Scripture. Nevertheless, this intimate connection between Tradition and Scripture does not imply that the inspired writings are not a source of

<sup>2</sup> Contra ep. fundament., c. 5. With regard to some books of Scripture that revelation may be found in Scripture itself, where we find the testimony of Christ and his Apostles to the inspiration of many of the books of the Old Testament. Moreover, it may still be not unnecessary-although it has been done so often before—to point out that the Catholic is not guilty of a vicious circle in arguing "from the Bible to the Church and from the Church to the Bible." The Catholic apologist does indeed argue (partly, not entirely) from data found in the Bible to the divine institution of the Catholic Church: but at this stage he does not use the Bible as inspired, but simply as a trustworthy historical document. The logical sequence, therefore, is not simply "from the Bible to the Church and from the Church to the Bible," but rather from a trustworthy Bible to a divinely instituted Church. Then follows an act of faith (made on the authority of God and under the direction of his Church) in the inspiration of the Bible.

revelation distinct from the oral Tradition which transmits them to us. The Church, infallibly assisted by the Holy Ghost, tells us what God has revealed. In the Scriptures it is God himself who gives us his revelation. But so deep is the reverence in which the Church holds the inspired word of God that she guards it most jealously, encouraging scholars, indeed, in their endeavours more profoundly to penetrate its meaning, but keeping upon them a salutary check, lest human ingenuity should corrupt the wisdom that is divine.

## \$ 3.

These, then, are the two sources of divine revelation: Tradition preserved by the living and infallible teaching authority of the Church, and Scripture, the inspired word of God: sources of truth which the Church preserves pure and undefiled, and from which she derives that divine revelation which she proposes for belief in all ages.

What the Church, therefore, teaches as divinely revealed, that most certainly is revealed by God and must be believed on the divine authority. These truths, revealed by God—i.e., contained in Tradition or in

Scripture, or in both, and taught by the Church either in her solemn definitions or in her ordinary teaching—are called by the

technical name of dogmas.

A little reflection will serve to show that the act of faith by which a Catholic believes the dogmas of the Church does not differ essentially from the act of divine faith. The motive of faith is always the authority of God who reveals. Yet such an act of faith has an additional perfection, in that, besides accepting the authority of God, it includes also submission to the Catholic Church as the infallible and authentic interpreter of revelation. This act of faith is therefore called by the special name of "divine and Catholic" faith. It is divine because its motive is the divine authority; it is Catholic because the truth is accepted as divinely revealed on the authority of the infallible Catholic Church.

But, as is shown elsewhere, the infallible authority of the Church is by no means confined to the teaching of "dogmas." The Church is not only the teacher of revealed truth, she is also its guardian; and in the office of protecting God's truth against error she needs to pronounce infallibly upon many matters which, although they are not formally revealed by God, are nevertheless intimately

<sup>1</sup> Vol. xx: The Church on Earth.

connected with revelation. It cannot be too strongly emphasised that Catholics are bound under pain of grave sin to believe the truths thus infallibly taught by the Church. They are not dogmas, indeed, because in themselves they have not been revealed by God. Hence the motive of the assent which we give to them is not the divine authority. We believe them on the authority of the Catholic Church, inasmuch as she is exercising her office of guardian of revealed truth, an office committed to her by God himself. Evidently, therefore, refusal to believe them would be a serious sin against the virtue of faith.<sup>1</sup>

Having thus duly stressed the strict duty of Catholics in this matter, we may now proceed, without fear of being misunderstood, to explain more fully the important distinction between what for purposes of convenience I will call these "secondary truths," and "dogmas" in the proper sense of the word. The distinction is important for at least three reasons, for upon it depends the understanding (1) of what is meant by "heresy," (2) of what is meant by the "immutability" of Catholic dogma, and (3) of the restrictions placed upon theological discussion. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Cf. vol. xviii: The Supernatural Virtues, p. 53. Since the motive of this assent is the authority of the Church, such faith is called "ecclesiastical."

third point will be dealt with in the last chapter; of the first it is sufficient to say that "heresy" is the wilful denial of a dogma;<sup>1</sup> with the second we must deal here more fully.

A dogma, then, as opposed to a secondary truth, is a truth contained "in the word of God, written or handed down, and which the Church, either by a solemn judgement or by her ordinary and universal teaching, proposes for belief as having been divinely revealed." <sup>2</sup>

That the sources of revelation are two has been already sufficiently emphasized. Two points, however, in this definition need to be explained, since the neglect of either may lead to the exaggeration or to the undue limitation

of the field of dogma.

In the first place the truth must be contained in either of the sources of revelation. That is to say, it must have been revealed by God either expressly or in equivalent words—i.e., as the theologians say, "formally." Hence from the field of dogma properly so called are to be excluded those truths which are only connected—however intimately—with revelation. Thus a truth which is deduced by human reasoning from revealed truth—a theological conclusion—even though it may be infallibly taught by the Church and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 52. <sup>2</sup> Vatican Council, loc. cit., chap. iii.

therefore binding on our assent, is not a dogma. Thus varying practical or devotional applications of revealed truths are not dogmas; the infallible decisions of the Church on points of historical fact, such as the ecumenicity of certain Councils, though they are closely connected with revealed truth, are not, properly speaking, dogmas. Nor does the use of certain philosophical terms in the proposition of revealed truths consecrate as a dogma any tenet proper to that philosophical system.

On the other hand, a truth, to be dogma, need not be contained expressly in the sources of revelation. It is sufficient that it be revealed at least in equivalent words. Thus if two statements are revealed which together involve a third, then that third is revealed equivalently. If, for example, it is expressly revealed that man has free-will, and that Christ has a true human nature, then it is equivalently revealed that Christ has free-will. In this and many similar instances the third proposition is not deduced by human reasoning, but gathered directly from the meaning of what God has revealed.

In the second place, it is to be observed that to be a dogma a revealed truth need not be solemnly defined by the Church. It is sufficient, as the Church herself has repeatedly

declared, that it be proposed as being divinely revealed in her ordinary official teaching. But this at least is necessary. Hence, regularly, a private revelation—i.e., a revelation made by God for the benefit of one individual or group of individuals—binds only those to whom and for whom it is made. It is not intended for all the faithful, it is not accompanied by any divine guarantee that it will be transmitted to others without adulteration, nor is it, as such, contained in the deposit of faith committed to the Church. The approbation granted by the Church to these revelations means nothing more than "permission, given after due examination, to publish them for the edification and utility of the faithful." 1 Moreover, by such approbation the Church does not—at any rate infallibly guarantee even their authenticity.2 Hence truths so revealed form no part of the dogmatic teaching of the Church.

Having thus, so far as space allows, cleared the ground of misconceptions, we may now answer the questions: What is the meaning of the immutability of Catholic dogma?

Does it in any way develop?

The answer to the first question is contained in what has already been said. The revela-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Benedict XIV: De Beatif., etc., lib. 2, c. 32.
<sup>2</sup> Pius X: Encyclical Pascendi.

tion of Christ is definitive. He, with the Holy spirit whom he sent, has revealed to his Apostles all truth. But a dogma, as we have seen, is a truth which is contained in that revelation. Therefore dogma, in the sense that it proposes for belief no truth which was not thus revealed to the Apostles and by them handed down to the Church, is immutable.

But undoubtedly a certain development is to be admitted. The subject is most complex and demands a far fuller treatment than can possibly be accorded it in the present volume; we must be content with the merest outline. In the first place clearly any "development" must be excluded from dogma which would result in the adulteration of the original meaning of God's revealed word. This would be incompatible with the immutability already established. Thus the view that dogmas, being mere symbols to represent the evolution of the universal religious consciousness, may in course of time come to mean the opposite of what they meant before; the view that dogmas develop in the sense that they are re-stated—and this often means contradicted—to suit the practical or scientific needs of the age; these and similar views must be definitely rejected as incompatible with the essential immutability of divine revelation.

How, then, does dogma develop? Albertus Magnus a succinctly describes this development as "the progress of the faithful in the faith, rather than of the faith within the faithful." In other words, the whole of revealed truth is contained in the sources of revelation, but in the course of ages it has undergone, and still undergoes, a process of "unfolding," whereby the faithful, under the infallible guidance of the Church assisted by the Holy Ghost, arrive at a fuller understanding of the truths which God has revealed. Of this "unfolding" process, however, the cause is not the understanding of the faithful, but the infallible teaching authority of the Catholic Church.

It is inevitable, in the nature of things, that a body of truth committed to human understanding should undergo a process of development. The truth is apprehended by the mind now under one aspect, now under another; every new point of view is a development. A universal truth contains implicitly its application to many individual cases; every such application is a development. The human mind relates one statement to another by a logical sequence, and thus is enabled more fully to understand them both;

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Quoted by Franzelin: De Divina Traditione . . ., p. 260.

the fuller understanding of truth is a development. Such development occurs in every science. But there is this important difference in regard to revealed truth, that whereas in human science progress is made from the totally unknown to the known, often from error to truth and *vice versa*, in the development of dogma there are no such vicissitudes, because the only cause of development in Catholic dogma is the infallible teaching of the Church.

Theologians may study revealed truth, may find new modes of expression, may discover or set into clearer relief new implications thereof; the denial of a truth by heretics may orientate discussion towards aspects of the truth hitherto but little studied; old formulas may be found to be not false, but no longer adequate, in consequence of misunderstanding or misconstruction, for the controversial needs of the day; the devotion of the faithful may lead to a greater emphasis being laid upon certain aspects of the truth. But when all is said and done, it is the Church, assisted by the Holy Ghost, that unfolds the truth, since, until she has embodied in her official teaching the results of theological study or of devotional impulse, there is no development in Catholic dogma.

To illustrate this development of revealed

truth "in one and the same doctrine, one and the same judgement," 1 many examples might be taken from history. One characteristic instance must suffice. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception of our Blessed Lady was solemnly defined by Pope Pius IX in the year 1854. It was defined, not as a conclusion drawn from revealed doctrine, but as being contained in the revealed word of God. And, in fact, if we examine the sources of Revelation, Scripture and Tradition, we find that this is so. In the Scriptures, as interpreted by Tradition, this truth is implicitly contained in the statement that Mary is "full" of grace, that between her and Satan there is complete enmity, such that she could never have been under Satan's power. During the first three centuries we find in Tradition the constant teaching—as a doctrine divinely revealed-that Mary is the new Eve, that she plays a part in the Redemption analogous to that which Eve played in the Fall-i.e., that she is ever on the side of the Redeemer against sin. Hence, later, the Fathers teach that she is all-pure, so much so that S Augustine, in spite of his insistence against the Pelagians upon the natural sinfulness of mankind, yet refuses to mention the name of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Vatican Council, loc. cit., chap. iv, quoting Vincent of Lerins: Common., n. 28.

Mary in connection with sin. With the impetus given to devotion to our Lady by the Council of Ephesus we find lyrical outbursts, especially among the Eastern Fathers, extolling the purity of our Lady, and-from the seventh century onwards—not infrequent mention of the feast of her Conception. Differences of opinion among the theologians of the Middle Ages as to the precise essence of original sin prevented many of them from explicitly exempting our Lady from this heredity stain; but with the clearer understanding of that doctrine came the explicit statement and universal belief that not for one moment of her existence was our Lady stained with original sin.

The history of this dogma is very instructive as showing how a particular truth, implicitly contained from the very beginning in a more general one, may, under the successive influence of theological study, devotional impulse, and even theological disagreement, come to be explicitly understood, universally believed, and, in the end, solemnly defined by

the Church.

But the dogmas of the Church, though they are the most important part of her doctrine, form but a part of her infallible teaching. Besides dogmas strictly so called, our heritage includes a wealth of doctrine

derived from revealed truth, the fruit, in great measure, of the loving meditation of our forefathers in the faith and of the devoted study of theologians.

### CHAPTER VII

#### THEOLOGY

THEOLOGY may be briefly described as the science of revealed truth. Presupposing revelation and faith it applies the scientific method to the study of revealed truth. The theologian not only accepts the truths which God has revealed, but he links them together in their logical sequence, showing the connection of one with another, their mutual harmony and their analogy with the conclusions of human reason. Nor does he deal only with revelation as such; by applying to revealed truth the principles of human reasoning he deduces conclusions, and these in their turn he links up with other conclusions and with other revealed truths, thus forming a complete and harmonious system.

The chief sources used by theology are clearly the sources of Revelation, Scripture, and Tradition. The theologian shows how the various dogmas of the Church are contained therein, traces their development from implicit to explicit belief, the different aspects under which they have been studied at different periods of the Church's history, and

deals with the heresies and the controversies that have arisen in regard to each. But he does not confine his study of Tradition to the truths which have always been believed as revealed by God. He investigates the conclusions which in the past have been drawn from revealed truth, testing the consensus of Fathers and theologians concerning them as a criterion of their accuracy, and as indicating the common belief of the faithful on matters

closely connected with revelation.

Like other sciences, theology has its subsidiary sources. Chief among these is philosophy, by means of which the theologian is able not only to demonstrate the preambles of faith, not only to show that the data of revelation are in perfect accordance with the conclusions of human reason, but also to gain a most "fruitful understanding even of mysteries." These must, of course, remain veiled in a certain obscurity as long as we walk "by faith"; yet by the aid of philosophy the theologian vindicates their reasonable character, defends them against the accusation of absurdity, and is able to learn much of their meaning. As we have already seen,1 the terms in which mysteries are revealed are familiar to us. Philosophy enables the theologian to define more accurately the meaning

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of those terms, and in this way to acquire a better understanding of the mystery itself.

But philosophy, though useful in theology, is subsidiary, and must take a subordinate place. There comes a stage in the study of mysteries where the philosopher must bow his head and be content, and even rejoice, to walk by faith alone. Moreover, he must submit to learn from revelation the limits of his own science. If a philosophical tenet is found to be in contradiction with a revealed truth, then the philosopher must retrace his steps to see where he has wrongly reasoned. To this extent the theologian must always argue a priori. If a truth is certainly revealed by God-and that, through the infallible teaching of the Church, he can always ascertain-then any human conclusion or hypothesis, whether it be philosophical, historical, or scientific, which contradicts it, is most certainly erroneous. The theologian, on the other hand, must beware lest in such matters he himself introduce confusion by expounding the word of God otherwise than the Church understands it.1

Similarly other sciences, especially history and the natural sciences, are used as subsidiary in theology. These are valuable as supplying knowledge concerning the created

universe, and particularly concerning the nature of man, the most noble of God's visible creatures. But they too must be used under conditions and safeguards analogous to those already described. It has been said before, but it is worth while repeating, that between the natural revelation which God has made of his perfections in the universe and the supernatural revelation which he has given us through his Church, there can be no real contradiction. In God's providence the one

is complementary to the other.

One important observation must be made before we conclude. Theologians are fallible and therefore they differ. In the volumes of the series of which this is the first, there will be set forth not only the dogmas of the Church, not only quite certain theological conclusions which, since they are taught by the infallible Church, must be accepted by "ecclesiastical" faith,1 not only more remote conclusions which, by reason of the common consent of theologians, it would be "rash" to deny, but also other statements, intended to explain, to amplify, or philosophically to justify some doctrine of the Church, statements which have not the same infallible certainty. On these matters, in which the integrity or the security of revealed truth is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See above, p. 75, note.

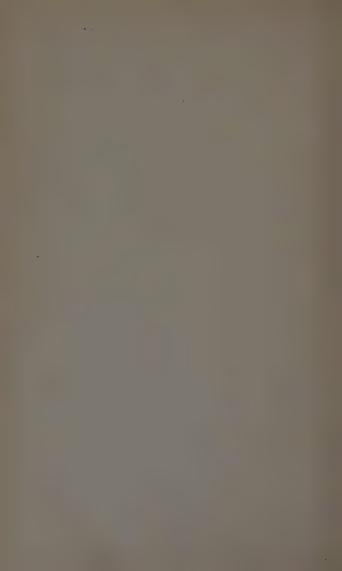
### THEOLOGY

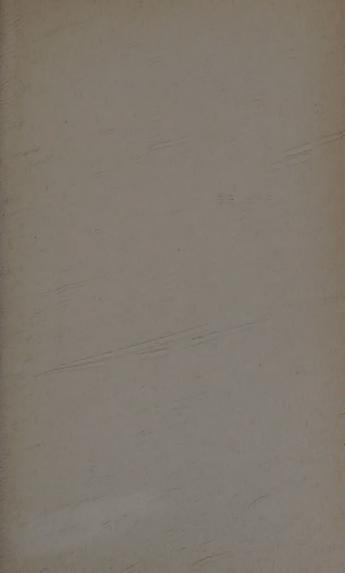
not in question, theologians enjoy freedom of discussion. Upon such controversies, since the sincere object of the participants is the fuller understanding of revealed truth, the Church looks with no unfavourable eye, solicitous ever to promote charity among the disputants with that single-minded desire for truth, and loving appreciation of the word of God, which are the heart and soul of theology.

A volume whose subject is faith, a chapter whose theme is theology, would be incomplete without a final homage to the angelic saint, prince of theologians, Doctor of the Church, S Thomas Aquinas, who to an heroic supernatural piety united an acuteness of mind and an insight into the things of God which all may emulate, but few, if any, attain.









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